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Slavery

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SLAVERY.

On this subject I have read, with much interest, a very able correspondence between the Rev. R. Fuller and Dr. Wayland, in which it is admitted, that slavery did exist among the Jews, and was regulated by scriptural authority under the old dispensation ; that it was universal at the christian era, and that some of the primitive disciples held slaves ; that slaves were then exhorted to be contented in their situation, and that all men were admonished to yield obedience to the laws ; for rulers were said not to be a terror to good works, but to evil. From these authorities, without further inquiry, I am able to say, that if a christian man is held in slavery by authority of the municipal law of the country in which he resides, his duty is to be contented with his situation, and to yield implicit obedience to those laws. A christian slave cannot flee from his master's service, nor can a disciple of Christ excite slaves to rebellion, or aid, abet, or assist them to escape from such service. And all this is equally true, whether slavery be sinful or not. If, by his act, the slave-holder commits a breach of the moral principles of the gospel, it is nevertheless the duty of the christian slave to submit to the requirements of the municipal law. The exhortation, therefore, to the slave to be contented with his situation, does not prove that slavery is consistent with the moral principles of the gospel. Nor does the existence and regulation of slavery under the old dispensation, prove it to have been consistent with those principles. If the Patriarch Abraham was now living, he could not be admitted to a christian communion table. We account a planter, who has illicit connection with his bond-women or slaves, to be a man of bad moral character ; but I think, even under that dark dispensation, the true light did

occasionally appear. The Prophet Isaiah, undoubtedly had reference to slavery in the 58th chapter, 6th verse, of his book, in which he says, "Is not this fast that I have chosen to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke." Slavery, in its origin, is effected, or brought about by means wholly inconsistent with the great moral principles of the gospel. A slave is always made such by war and carnage. Mr. Fuller will no doubt admit, that the christian man could never have been concerned in the original reduction of any free man to a state of slavery; this must have been effected by wicked men.

It is not said in the Holy Scriptures in so many words, that slavery is or is not a sin against God. I am, nevertheless, satisfied that it is wholly irreconcilable with the spirit of the gospel, and that the argument of Dr. Wayland, going to show that the Scriptures generally teach by moral principles in place of special precepts, is undoubtedly sound; that if the latter method had been pursued, and every species of sin that mortals can commit, had been particularized, and singly and specially prohibited, that no library would have been large enough to have contained the books in which all those precepts should have been written. If, therefore, it be admitted, that slavery cannot be reconciled with the great principles of the gospel, and that it is not expressly declared to be harmless, the result is, that a christian man cannot, unless laboring under peculiar circumstances, hold slaves. This position brings me to the principal questions that I intend to consider.

1st. Whether a christian man can, under any circumstances, hold slaves; and

2d. Whether abolition ought to be immediate or gradual.

I entertain no doubt whatever but that a practical Christian can hold slaves. Suppose he is born and brought up in a slave State, and inherits a plantation with the slaves upon it; that he treats them with christian kindness and affection; that he gives them proper religious instruction, and that it is either unlawful or inexpedient to manumit them—all of which certainly does occur. I consider, under such circumstances, that he is acquitted of the guilt of slavery, although I admit that slavery in the abstract is sinful. But I believe that the intelligent christian slaveholder will, nevertheless, be constantly impressed with the idea, that slavery is inconsistent with the moral principles of the gospel, and will exert himself to bring about general emancipation.

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 And I am inclined to think also, that if slave-holders generally were obliged to treat their slaves as a christian man feels bound to treat his, that slavery would become unprofitable, and be abandoned.

In respect to immediate emancipation in the Southern States, I am decidedly opposed to it.

I hold that a christian man may not only hold slaves under certain circumstances, but that it would be morally wrong in him to manumit them. I suppose that both the slave and the master, require preparation for general emancipation, and that if it should take place without that preparation, that it would endanger the peace and welfare of the State. The slaves are now uneducated and not properly instructed in gospel principles, and to manumit them in this condition would greatly endanger the peace of the State, and would require a standing army, as in the British dominions, to keep them in subjection. I have myself spent a winter in the West India Islands, and I am satisfied that our English friends have committed a serious error in immediate emancipation. A large portion of the slaves are idle, shiftless members of society; begging is a common profession; they work when they please, and many of them for much of the time remain idle. The Danish government have lately caused large school-houses to be erected in their Islands for the education of slaves, and a portion of the week is by law allotted to them to attend school. That government is no doubt preparing for gradual emancipation, and is endeavoring to steer clear of the error committed by our English friends. The consequence of immediate emancipation in the English dominions is likely in time to destroy the very people it was intended to benefit. And it is to be apprehended that the same consequences would now result from a like measure, in some of the Southern States.

I understand both of the talented disputants to admit, that if the fact be established that slavery is contrary to the doctrines of the gospel, that then immediate emancipation should take place, whatever may be the consequences—it is this position mainly that the writer intends to combat. It will be admitted that St. Paul knew whether slavery was or was not sinful—if he knew it to be sinful and did not exhort the primitive disciples to immediate emancipation, he would, if this position be correct, have failed in an important duty.

I verily believe he knew it to conflict with the principles of the gospel, but that he foresaw that manumission ought to be brought about by the operation of those principles upon the heart, and not by special precept or command ; special precept or command might in such case have operated upon the disciples only, and partial abolition have endangered the state ; or there might have been a law of the state prohibiting it. One article of the decalogue is, "Thou shalt not kill." Now suppose it probable that, by immediate emancipation in the State of South Carolina, where the black population greatly exceeds the white, that a general massacre might take place, would emancipation, with such an apprehension, be an immediate duty, whatever might be the consequences ? The legislature of that state have apprehended that such might be the consequences of manumission, and they have accordingly passed laws regulating it. The act of manumission, therefore, which gentlemen say ought to take place immediately, might, and probably would, lead in its consequences to a breach of the law of God, in the violation of one of the most important articles of the decalogue.

It is admitted that there can be no excuse for not performing any of the expressed commands of the Almighty, as contained in the decalogue.

The performance of any of these commands will not endanger the state of society ; but by the act of manumission, which these gentlemen suppose to be an immediate duty, the state may be endangered. And from this very probable consequence, these gentlemen are called upon to consider, whether there is not a manifest difference between the performance of a law of God, or the conformity to a principle of the gospel, as to the time and manner of such compliance ? In other words, is there not a harmony in the operation of the blessed principles of the gospel, which deserves to be considered by the disciples of Christ. We are commanded to be obedient to the law of the land ; but if, by immediate emancipation, we commit a breach of that law, ought we not to pause before we disobey this inculcation ? We are commanded not to kill ; but if, in consequence of emancipation, thousands are killed, ought the disciple of Christ to manumit, notwithstanding the consequences ? It will be found on examination, that whatever God has expressly enjoined upon his people, (as in the articles of the decalogue,) does not conflict at all with the safety of a state ; but what is left to be worked out by the principles of the

blessed gospel, can only, in many instances, be brought about with safety to the body politic, by the operation of these principles upon the heart. Both the slave and the master are properly prepared for a change from slavery to freedom by the benign principles of the gospel.

The State of South Carolina at the last census, in 1830, had a free white population of 258,000 souls, a free black population of 8,000, and a slave population of 315,000—making in all 323,000 blacks to 258,000 whites.

This slave population is now much greater, and is continually increasing. Any one can foresee, that such a state of things cannot continue very long. The State will be surcharged, and a ruinous condition of things must be the consequence. If Texas should be annexed to the United States, it might afford a market for their slaves. It is believed that the apprehensions of slaveholders are sufficiently awake to this subject to lead them to an alienation of this description of property, and that the slaves of the Southern States would, in that case, be principally transferred to Texas. Even if immediate emancipation was deemed advisable, we have not the same means which the British Government had to effect it. They paid to the planters one hundred millions of dollars for their slaves. There is no government here that has the means to pay for slaves. The slave States themselves are poor, and in the providence of God, they always will be poor; for slavery impoverishes a nation. It is with States as with individuals. "He that commits sin swallows poison, which from that moment begins to operate."

Suppose that Dr. Wayland's views should prevail, and a law of South Carolina be passed for immediate emancipation, what would be the consequence? Most of the planters would be reduced to poverty. The slave population greatly outnumbers the free, and in its present condition, being ignorant and without a proper sense of moral principles, would probably take vengeance on their former masters, and a state of anarchy and bloodshed of a shocking character might ensue. I appeal to Dr. Wayland, whether he could contemplate such a change in the affairs of South Carolina with complacency? I am sure he could not. That a crazy abolitionist might rejoice in it, is not improbable, but that the rational christian would every where mourn over it, is quite certain.

The present predicament of some of our slave-holding States, requires for their alleviation wise, moderate and christian mea-

asures. And I suggest to Dr. Wayland, whether the most efficacious means now to be employed is not the preaching the gospel?

Neither the slave nor the master are prepared for immediate emancipation. The instruction of the slave in moral and religious principles should be the first object, after which the State might commence with laws for gradual emancipation. I hope our Southern brethren will not allow themselves to be excited by the denunciations of abolitionists. I believe wise, good and discreet men at the North, are unanimously opposed to the conduct of those individuals. Abolition is desirable, but the means of effecting it require great wisdom, patience and forbearance.

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